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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000504

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EB (CEKUTA), EUR/WE, AF/S, AF/E

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [VT](#) [VTEAGR](#)

SUBJECT: AFRICA BIOTECH EXPERTS TELL HOLY SEE OFFICIALS:
"LET US FEED OUR PEOPLE"

REF: 02 VATICAN 6141

[11](#). SUMMARY: EMBASSY VATICAN HOSTED A ONE-DAY SEMINAR ON
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD JANUARY 27
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AIMED AT OFFERING AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON BIOTECH
DEVELOPMENTS TO KEY HOLY SEE OFFICIALS, NGO REPRESENTATIVES,
AND DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE
FROM MANY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. THE PANELISTS -- INCLUDING
FARMERS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ACTIVISTS AND SCIENTISTS --
MADE CLEAR THEIR BELIEF THAT AFRICA NEEDS TO AVAIL ITSELF OF
BIOTECH CROPS IN ORDER TO SECURE A HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS
FUTURE FOR ITS PEOPLE. IN THE FACE OF PERSISTENT SUSPICION
OF ECONOMIC MOTIVES BEHIND U.S. PROMOTION OF BIOTECH FOODS,
THE COMPELLING MESSAGE ARTICULATED BY THE AFRICAN PANELISTS
LEFT PARTICIPANTS WITH A CLEAR SENSE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR
BIOTECH FOODS NOT ONLY TO RELIEVE THE CURRENT FAMINE, BUT
ALSO TO CONTRIBUTE TO MORE EFFICIENT, SELF-SUSTAINING
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. END
SUMMARY.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

[12](#). CONTINUING EMBASSY VATICAN'S ADVOCACY FOR BIOTECH FOODS
WITH THE HOLY SEE AND AFFILIATED AGENCIES (REFTEL), MISSION
HOSTED A CONFERENCE IN COORDINATION WITH AFRICABIO AND THE
ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF BIOTECH COMPANIES AIMED AT BROADENING
OUR DIALOGUE WITH THE HOLY SEE BEYOND IMMEDIATE FAMINE RELIEF
TO LONGER-TERM ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF BIOTECH CROPS.
CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS WERE ABLE TO HIGHLIGHT THE ECONOMIC
BENEFITS BIOTECH CAN OFFER AFRICA, ASIA AND OTHER DEVELOPING
AREAS. ONE SOUTH AFRICAN FARMER AND BIOTECH PIONEER
(BUTHELIZI) TOLD HIS STORY OF OVERCOMING SKEPTICISM TOWARD
BIOTECH CROPS THROUGH HIS EXPERIENCES WITH THE MORE
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PROFITABLE SEED. WHEN FIRST OFFERED BIOTECH SEED, HE DECIDED
TO SPLIT HIS CROP 50-50 BETWEEN BIOTECH AND TRADITIONAL
MAIZE. THAT FIRST YEAR, HIS REGION EXPERIENCED HEAVY RAINS
AND FLOODING WHICH PROVED DISASTROUS FOR HIS TRADITIONAL
CROPS (EATEN BY PESTS) BUT HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON HIS
PEST-RESISTANT BIOTECH CROP. BUTHELIZI AND MOST OF HIS
NEIGHBORS NOW UTILIZE BIOTECH CROPS, AS THEY PREFER THE
RELIABLE PRODUCTION AND ABILITY TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.
RESPONDING TO ONE OF THE FREQUENT ARGUMENTS PUT FORWARD
AGAINST BIOTECH SEEDS, BUTHELIZI SAID IT WAS WORTH THE
INITIAL HIGHER COSTS TO PURCHASE BIOTECH SEED BECAUSE THE
BIOTECH PLANTS REQUIRED LESS MANUAL LABOR, FERTILIZER, AND
PESTICIDES, WHILE PROVIDING HIGHER YIELD CROPS. AN INDIAN
COTTON FARMER, JAYAPAL REDDY, ECHOED BUTHELIZI'S COMMENTS,
AND INSISTED THAT PEOPLE IN THE WEST SHOULD "LET THE WISDOM
OF INDIAN FARMERS DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO USE BIOTECH."

[13](#). BINTONY KUTSAIRA, A MEMBER OF MALAWI'S PARLIAMENT,
OUTLINED THE MACROECONOMIC EFFECTS BIOTECH CROPS WOULD HAVE
FOR AFRICA. HE POINTED OUT THAT 80 PERCENT OF AFRICA'S
POPULATION IS ENGAGED IN FARMING, BUT CANNOT MANAGE TO
PRODUCE ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED ITS PEOPLE, WHEREAS, LESS THAN 10
PERCENT OF EUROPE'S POPULATION IS ENGAGED IN FARMING YET
PRODUCES ENOUGH TO MEET ITS OWN DIETARY NEEDS AND EXPORT ON A
COMMERCIAL SCALE (IN THE U.S. THE FIGURE IS LESS THAN 1
PERCENT). KUTSAIRA BLAMED AFRICA'S CHRONIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT
IN PART ON THIS LACK OF EFFICIENCY IN THE AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR. AS LONG AS SO MANY OF AFRICA'S PEOPLE ARE WORKING ON
SUBSISTENCE FARMS, EATING OUT A BASIC LIVING FROM ONE CRISIS
TO ANOTHER, HE CONCLUDED, AFRICA WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO
ADVANCE ECONOMICALLY.

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[14](#). REFLECTING THE PERVERSE MENTALITY OF "SUPPORT" FROM SOME
IN THE WEST, ONE JESUIT CURIA REPRESENTATIVE SUGGESTED THAT
INCREASED AGRICULTURAL EFFICIENCY FROM BIOTECH CROPS WOULD
LEAD TO GREATER UNEMPLOYMENT IN AFRICA BY DISPLACING WORKERS
FROM THE FARMS. PROFESSOR DIRAN MAKINDE FROM THE UNIVERSITY
OF VENDA IN SOUTH AFRICA, COUNTERED THAT THE LACK OF
PRODUCTIVITY WAS LEADING MORE AND MORE PEOPLE TO DESERT THE

FARMS FOR CITIES ANYWAY, DESPITE LIMITED PROSPECTS. GREATER PRODUCTIVITY, HE NOTED, WOULD EVENTUALLY ALLOW MORE SKILLED WORKERS TO MOVE "FROM THE FIELD INTO THE FACTORY" TO PRODUCE GOODS WITH A HIGHER ADDED VALUE. PROFESSOR MAKINDE UNDERScoreD HIS FRUSTRATION WITH ARGUMENTS THAT EFFECTIVELY SAID AFRICA SHOULD REMAIN TRAPPED IN A CHRONIC UNDERDEVELOPED STATE.

HEALTH BENEFITS

15. PANEL MEMBERS ALSO EMPHASIZED POTENTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS THAT BIOTECH CROPS WOULD BRING TO AFRICA, NOTING THAT BIOTECH FOODS COULD HELP SECURE A CONSISTENT, NUTRITIONAL DIET TO HELP IN THE STRUGGLES AGAINST AIDS, MALARIA AND TUBERCULOSIS.

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ACTION EB-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	USNW-00	DODE-00	ITCE-00	SRPP-00	EXME-00
	EUR-00	E-00	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	ACE-00	SP-00
	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00	ECA-00
	DRL-01	G-00	SAS-00	/009W			

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R 071029Z FEB 03
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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SUBJECT: AFRICA BIOTECH EXPERTS TELL HOLY SEE OFFICIALS:
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MP KUTSAIRA POINTED OUT THAT THAT WHILE EUROPEANS HAD THE LUXURY OF DEBATING THE PROS AND CONS OF BIOTECH CROPS, AFRICANS DID NOT. HE STRESSED THAT BIOTECH CROPS NEEDED TO BE UTILIZED NOW BY AFRICA IN ORDER TO MEET THE DIETARY NEEDS
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OF AFRICANS. THE FARMER, BUTHELIZI, EXPLAINED HOW BIOTECH CROPS HAVE LED HIM TO USE FEWER PESTICIDES, SO THAT HE AND HIS EMPLOYEES -- AS WELL AS CONSUMERS -- BENEFIT FROM LESS EXPOSURE TO THE CHEMICALS. PROFESSOR MAKINDE CONCLUDED THAT AFRICA COULD NOT AFFORD TO MISS OUT ON BIOTECH AS IT HAD MISSED THE FIRST 'GREEN REVOLUTION.'

GETTING FACTS STRAIGHT ON BIOTECH

16. ALL PANEL MEMBERS AGREED THAT AFRICA AND THE WEST HAVE TO GET THEIR FACTS STRAIGHT ON BIOTECH. MP KUTSAIRA OBSERVED THAT AFRICANS NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THAT FOOD AID IS NOT THE LONG TERM SOLUTION; SELF-SUFFICIENCY IS. PROFESSOR L.E. MUMBA OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA, SAID THAT AFRICA HAS TO DEVELOP ITS CAPACITY IN BIOTECH RESEARCH, BIOTECH MARKETING, AND IN PREDICTING AND ADAPTING TO WEATHER BEFORE IT CAN BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT. PROFESSOR JAMES OCHANDA OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF CLARIFYING THE INFORMATION ABOUT BIOTECH FOODS CIRCULATING IN AFRICA, ADDING THAT TOO MUCH MISINFORMATION IS BEING SPREAD, WHICH IS GENERATING SIGNIFICANT CONFUSION. PROFESSOR JOCELYN WEBSTER, A SOUTH AFRICAN AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AFRICABIO, POINTED OUT THAT EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS AND AGRICULTURAL LOBBIES HAVE BEEN INFLUENCING AFRICANS FOR YEARS WITH INCOMPLETE OR FALSE INFORMATION. SHE RELATED A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TRYING TO SELL SOUTH AFRICAN BT FEEDCORN TO A NAMIBIAN CATTLE OPERATION. THE NAMIBIANS REFUSED IT BECAUSE THEIR EUROPEAN END-USERS HAD SAID THEY WOULD NOT RISK IMPORTING BT-FED BEEF GIVEN THE CURRENT ANTI-BIOTECH CLIMATE
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IN EUROPE. RESPONDING TO THE OFT HEARD ARGUMENT THAT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR BIOTECH FOODS BECAUSE THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD IN THE WORLD ALREADY, PROFESSOR OCHANDA SAID THAT THE WORLD NEEDED TO ACCEPT THAT THE REDISTRIBUTION OF FOOD WAS NOT WORKING. MOST FOOD IS CONSUMED WHERE IT IS GROWN AND

REDISTRIBUTION IS MORE OF A BAND-AID THAN A SOLUTION FOR THE RECURRING CRISES IN AFRICA. HE LIKENED BIOTECH TO THE KEY THAT WOULD FREE AFRICA FROM THE RECURRING CYCLES OF FEAST OR FAMINE. BUTHELIZI SAID THAT THE WORLD, EUROPE IN PARTICULAR, NEEDED TO LET AFRICANS USE THEIR OWN JUDGMENT TO DETERMINE HOW BEST "TO FEED OUR PEOPLE."

COMMENT

17. BASED ON OUR DISCUSSIONS AFTER THE CONFERENCE, HOLY SEE PARTICIPANTS APPEARED TO BE OPEN TO THE AFRICANS' ARGUMENTS AND WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY." WE NOTE THAT BOTH THE JESUITS -- WHO HAVE BEEN THE SOURCE OF CONSIDERABLE PROBLEMS IN ZAMBIA -- AND CARITAS EUROPE HAVE PUBLISHED POSITION PAPERS OPPOSED TO BIOTECHNOLOGY IN AFRICA. THIS MEETING EXPOSED THEIR HEAD OFFICES TO THE "GOOD NEWS" ON AG-BIOTECH AND ITS POTENTIAL TO HELP COMMUNITIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD, AND HOPEFULLY WILL FOSTER A REASSESSMENT THAT COULD EVENTUALLY MAKE ITS WAY TO THE FIELD. THE MESSAGE THEY HEARD FROM THE AFRICANS AND ASIANS WAS CONSISTENT AND CLEAR: THEY WANT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO BE ABLE TO DECIDE WHAT IS IN THEIR OWN BEST INTEREST AND THEY WANT AN END TO DESTRUCTIVE OUTSIDE INFLUENCES. THEY ALSO MADE A STRONG BID FOR MORE ASSISTANCE
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IN DEVELOPING THEIR CAPACITY TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.
WITH 90 PERCENT OF AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS DESTINED FOR EUROPE, A RECURRING THEME WAS FOR EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS TO STOP BLOCKING BIOTECH ADVANCEMENTS BY KEEPING THEIR MARKETS CLOSED TO BIOTECH PRODUCTS. TO THE AFRICAN PANELISTS, EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS ARE SEEN AS PREVENTING ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT IN AFRICA BY THREATENING TO KEEP AFRICAN BIOTECH PRODUCTS OUT OF THE EUROPEAN MARKET.

NICHOLSON

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